

NCA
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THE SENATE'S CIVIL SERVICE REFORM BILL

ANNCR:

THE U.S. SENATE HAS PASSED A CIVIL SERVICE REFORM BILL PROPOSED BY PRESIDENT CARTER, BUT THE PLAN TO CHANGE THE RULES FOR GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT FACES STIFF OPPOSITION IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES. CHRIS KERN REPORTS ON WHERE THE LEGISLATION STANDS.

VOICE:

PRESIDENT CARTER CALLS IT THE "CENTERPIECE" OF HIS PLAN FOR GOVERNMENT REORGANIZATION, AND THE U.S. SENATE -- BY A VOTE OF 87 TO 1 -- HAS GIVEN IT TO HIM VIRTUALLY INTACT.

MR. CARTER'S PLAN FOR CIVIL SERVICE REFORM WOULD MAKE IT EASIER FOR GOVERNMENT EXECUTIVES TO DEMOTE OR FIRE INCOMPETENT SUBORDINATES. IT WOULD MAKE SENIOR GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES GIVE UP SOME OF THEIR JOB SECURITY, BUT THEY WOULD BE OFFERED A CHANCE TO EARN LARGE CASH BONUSES FOR OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE IN RETURN. AND IT WOULD SPLIT UP THE ADMINISTRATIVE AGENCY THAT SET RULES FOR FEDERAL EMPLOYMENT AND THE ONE THAT HEARS APPEALS BY DISCIPLINED EMPLOYEES.

ALL THOSE FEATURES, PROPOSED BY MR. CARTER, WERE INCLUDED IN THE BILL THAT PASSED THE SENATE. ABOUT THE ONLY THING THE SENATORS REMOVED WAS A CARTER PROPOSAL TO REDUCE THE PREFERENCES GIVEN TO MILITARY VETERANS WHO APPLY FOR JOBS WITH THE CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT. MR. CARTER SAYS THOSE PREFERENCES IMPEDE HIRING ON THE BASIS OF MERIT. VETERANS GROUPS, WHO HAVE TRADITIONALLY HAD CONSIDERABLE INFLUENCE IN BOTH HOUSES OF CONGRESS, OPPOSE ANY SIGNIFICANT REDUCTION IN THE PRESENT PREFERENCE SYSTEM.

ANOTHER PROVISION ADOPTED BY THE SENATE WILL HELP GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES WHO MAKE CHARGES OF WRONGDOING IN THEIR AGENCIES -- SO-CALLED "WHISTLEBLOWERS" -- BY GIVING THEM A MEASURE OF PROTECTION FROM RETALIATION. UNDER THE SENATE-PASSED CARTER PLAN, THEY WOULD MAKE THEIR COMPLAINTS TO A SPECIAL GOVERNMENT LAWYER WHO WOULD INSTITUTE AN INVESTIGATION WITHOUT TELLING THE AGENCY'S EXECUTIVES WHO IT WAS THAT BLEW THE WHISTLE ON THEM (MADE THE COMPLAINT). IN ONE WIDELY-PUBLICIZED CASE A FEW YEARS AGO, A PENTAGON EMPLOYEE WHO POINTED OUT THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD LOST MILLIONS OF DOLLARS BECAUSE OF INEFFICIENT PROCEDURES FOR BUYING MILITARY AIRCRAFT WAS FIRED IN RETALIATION FOR SPEAKING OUT.

GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES GENERALLY LIKE THE "WHISTLEBLOWER" PROVISION AND A FEW OTHER FEATURES OF THE CARTER PLAN, BUT THEY ARE GENERALLY OPPOSED TO MR. CARTER'S MAIN PROPOSAL, WHICH WOULD REDUCE THE JOB SECURITY MOST FEDERAL EMPLOYEES CURRENTLY ENJOY. WHILE MR. CARTER COMPLAINS THAT IT'S ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE NOW TO FIRE OR DEMOTE AN INCOMPETENT EMPLOYEE -- OR, FOR THAT MATTER, TO REWARD A SUPERIOR ONE -- FEDERAL EMPLOYEE GROUPS, BACKED BY THIS COUNTRY'S BIG TRADE UNION MOVEMENT, SAY MR. CARTER'S PROPOSALS WOULD GIVE THE WHITE HOUSE TOO MUCH POLITICAL CONTROL OVER THE BUREAUCRACY.

THEIR COMPLAINTS WERE LARGELY INEFFECTIVE IN THE SENATE, BUT THE OPPOSITION TO THE REFORM PLAN IS EXPECTED TO BE BETTER ORGANIZED AND MORE SUCCESSFUL IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

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